

Interpreting History: The Legacy of Columbus

Bailey: Chapter 1

Supplement: Wilford, "Discovering Columbus"

How have historical interpretations of Christopher Columbus changed over time? Why? What does this indicate about the study of history?

Identifications:

Leif Erikson, Renaissance, feudalism, nation-state, Johann Gutenberg, Spanish Inquisition (Reconquista), conquistador, Christopher Columbus, Amerigo Vespucci, Hernán Cortés, Montezuma, encomienda system, John Cabot

Homework Questions:

1. The book talks of “weaving a narrative” that “no longer seems adequate” to describe European colonization of the “New World.” (p.2) If history is made up of facts, then where’s the weaving? If it is not, then isn’t one story just as good as any other?
2. Why did Spain take the lead in European exploration of the New World? What did the Spanish seek to gain from the New World?
3. What areas of the New World did the Spanish colonize?
4. What relationship developed between the Spanish and the Native Americans?
5. What did the French seek to gain from the New World? What areas of the New World did they colonize? Why did their influence in the New World remain limited?
6. How did the French relationship with the Native Americans differ from that of the Spanish?

7. Why did the English lag behind the French and Spanish in their colonization of the New World?

The Problem of Columbus

Supplement: Howard Zinn "Columbus, the Indians, and Human Progress"

Debate: How can we classify Columbus? Hero? Villain? Neither?

In preparation for the debate outline ten points that support your assigned position.

Identifications:

Arawak, Columbus, Hispaniola, encomiendas, Bartolomé de las Casas, Samuel Eliot Morison, Hernando Cortés, Montezuma

Homework Questions:

1. What motivated the Spanish monarchs to send Columbus to the "New World"? What motivated Columbus himself?
2. How does Las Casas depict the native populations?
3. Contrast the presentations of Columbus's conquests as told by Bartolomeo de las Casas and Samuel Eliot Morrison. How might we account for these differing stories?
4. If Zinn's point is not to "condemn Columbus in absentia," then what is his point?
5. What two interpretations about settlers and natives does Zinn present? To which one do you subscribe, if any?

6. What is your definition of progress? How did Europeans define progress? According to Zinn, is "progress" an absolute good? Support your response with evidence from the text.